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SUBJECT: MINORITY GOVERNMENT: WIN SOME, LOSE SOME
LEGISLATIVE REFORMS

REFTEL: BRATISLAVA 524

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1. (U) Summary. Over the past two months, the GOS got some groundbreaking legislation through Parliament, but also suffered setbacks in its reform program. Victories included the anti-discrimination law (reftel) and important anti-corruption laws. The minority government currently controls only 68 of 150 seats. It sought support from opposition and independent MP's, compromises with coalition partners, and the final laws were sometimes stronger than the original drafts. The Ministry of Health's controversial reform package passed the first reading but still faces an uphill battle. However, the Ministry of Education's university reform failed to pass after Free Forum members and other independents did not vote with the coalition. End Summary.

Coalition Rifts Mended with Compromises

2. (U) The Conflict of Interest Law, which mandates the public disclosure of assets for officials, now applies to all mayors, town councils, members of Parliament, and regional authorities. The main changes between this bill and the one originally proposed by Justice Minister Daniel Lipsic is that close relatives are not required to disclose assets, and a quorum of three-fifths (rather than simple majority) is necessary for Parliament to begin corruption proceedings against a member. Jan Hrubala, the Director of the Government Office for Anti-Corruption Initiatives, told poloffs that the compromise kept the integrity of the law intact. He said it had been necessary to gain support from most MPs and appease regional authorities wary of new regulations imposed by the national government. To help implement the law, the government will seek approval of a bill to expand the powers of local auditors.

3. (U) Parliament also passed the highly politicized anti-discrimination law (see reftel), which coalition partners had debated for years. Hrubala said the government planned to amend 20 other laws with blanket anti-discrimination clauses to further protect vulnerable populations.

Non-Partisan Judicial Reform Easily Approved

4. (U) Minister Lipsic's reorganization of the judicial system sailed through Parliament. The American Bar Association and Central Eurasian Initiative (ABA/CEELI) assisted with the original study that recommended merging district and regional courts into larger circuit courts. Larger courts allow increased specialization of judges in areas such as family or bankruptcy law and cut unnecessary expenditures. The number of justices on the Supreme Court will be reduced. They will only hear extraordinary appeals and interpret the law.

Major Reforms Face Uphill Battle

5. (SBU) Alliance for the New Citizen (ANO) Health Minister Zajac's reform package barely passed the first reading in Parliament, after contentious public debate. It still faces strong opposition for the second and third readings. The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) Education Minister Fronc's university reform was rejected. Both plans are unpopular with employees of the health and education sectors, even though the government ran targeted public awareness campaigns. KDH MP Maria Majdova told poloffs that the coalition did not have sufficient support within the ministries to counteract pressure from opposition parties. The coalition had relied on support from Free Forum and independent MP's to pass reform-oriented legislation, but many of them voted against Fronc's law, which would introduce tuition fees and was therefore unpopular among students and parents. Fronc will likely submit a modified bill in September.

Comment

18. (SBU) The minority government has come to rely on independent MPs and the Free Form party of former SDKU members to pass important elements of its reform program, often amidst claims that the MP's receive favors in exchange. Vojtech Tkac, chairman of HZDS breakaway party People's Union (LU), resigned his position because his deputies frequently voted against their party's platform and with the coalition. MP's across party lines vote for

government initiatives with broad public support such as the Conflict of Interest and Anti-Discrimination bills. Unpopular reforms that have a wider impact on the public, such as health care and university reform, will be more difficult for the coalition to push through without a parliamentary majority. While the government coalition currently seems certain to hold together until the end of its term, its weakened position (due to many defections from the ANO and SDKU parties) presents a tough challenge for continuing the aggressive reform program.

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